

# PAULINE RHETORIC AND THE DISCERNMENT OF THE WISDOM OF GOD ACCORDING TO 1 CORINTHIANS 2

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## ABSTRACT

This article investigates the rhetoric Paul used in 1 Corinthians 2 to create a dichotomous spirituality among his readers in order to convince the readers of the necessity and importance of the correct discernment of the wisdom of God. This is needed to address the problem of factionalism which led to the schism in the Corinthian believing community. The rhetorical devices implemented by Paul to convince his readers to accept his message of the importance to know the wisdom of God are: repetition, comparison and contrast, dialectic language, curiosity and an attractive result.

**Keywords:** Rhetoric, wisdom of God, repetition, comparison and contrast, dialectic language, curiosity, mind of Christ.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Discernment of the correct understanding and implementation of the wisdom of God was a matter of great concern for Paul.<sup>1</sup> This is clear from 1 Corinthians 2. In this chapter Paul describes the process of how the wisdom of God has been communicated to him and the members of the Corinthian congregation as well as its result.

This all happened in a situation when divisions were experienced in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 1–4). The divisions revolve around the prejudiced following of various leaders in this believing community. This is introduced as early as 1 Corinthians 1:10–17. This introduction is followed by Paul's discussion of the contrast between human

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1 See 1 Corinthians 1–4.

and divine wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16,<sup>2</sup> an issue that is directly related to this factionalism.<sup>3</sup> Paul tends to treat the problem of division as being symptomatic of a much deeper problem: the Corinthians' attraction to 'the language of worldly wisdom.'<sup>4</sup> It is possible that some in the community understood themselves to be wise, and that these people regarded themselves as inspired, Spirit-filled persons (3:1).<sup>5</sup>

*The content of 1 Corinthians 2 revolves around the communication of divine wisdom and centres in the dichotomy between worldly wisdom and divine wisdom.* For Paul to stress the necessity and importance of the discernment of this wisdom of God and to convince his readers to accept his communication of it, he uses several rhetorical devices.

There are many publications on ancient rhetoric.<sup>6</sup> A normal approach in rhetorical analysis would be to choose a particular rhetorical model in order to analyse this

2 John B. Polhill, 'The Wisdom of God and Factionalism: 1 Corinthians 1–4,' *RevExp* 80/3 (1983): 325.

3 This becomes clear in 1 Cor. 3:18–21 and 4:6–10 that the boasting of the Corinthians over various leaders involves a boasting of their own wisdom. Paul, himself, has also been charged by some members as lacking wisdom (see also 1 Cor. 4:1–5, 8–21).

4 Charles B. Cousar, '1 Corinthians 2:1–13,' *Int.* 44/2 (1990): 169f.

5 Cousar, *1 Corinthians*, 170.

6 Derek M. McNamara, *The Rhetoric of Honour and Shame in 1 Corinthians 1–6* (Pretoria: Unisa), 41–44 discusses scholarly opinions about Paul's training in rhetoric. He pointed out the diverse opinions with regard to this. Some scholars say that Paul was trained in ancient rhetoric, like Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster, 1991), 296 and Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 38. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Rhetorical Situation and Historical Reconstruction in 1 Corinthians,' *NTS* 33 (1987): 36–40 also argues that Paul uses deliberative rhetoric in 1 Corinthians. Wilhelm Wüllner, 'Hermeneutics and Rhetorics: From "Truth and Method" to "Truth and Power,"' *Scriptura* 3 (1989): 1–54 and Raymond Humphries, 'Paul's Rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 1–4' (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1979), 110 argue that Paul used epideictic rhetoric in 1 Corinthians. Hans D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermenia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 24 identified the Epistle to the Galatians as an example of judicial rhetoric.

Contrary to these scholars there are those who argue that Paul had no special training in rhetoric. According to R. Dean Anderson Jr., *Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul* (Rev. ed.; Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 290, who examines Galatians, Romans, and 1 Corinthians from the perspective of 'rhetorical textual analysis,' Paul had no specific knowledge of ancient rhetorical theory.

Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction Through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 12 suggests the reading of 1 Corinthians not through the lens of one of the three species of rhetoric, but reading 1 Corinthians as 'textual rhetoric.' According to her 'The arguments Paul uses repeatedly in 1 Corinthians qualify as textual rhetoric, as argumentative features characteristic of this particular text.' Bruce W. Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 252 also argues that Paul had literary rhetoric ability. Christopher Forbes, 'Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony: Paul's Boasting and Conventions in Hellenistic Rhetoric,' *NTS* 32 (1986): 1–30 argues that Paul did indeed have rhetoric skills which he may have acquired in his travels and preaching career or he may have learned them during his formal education, 'at least at the level of the *grammatici*, or the rhetorical school.'

chapter.<sup>7</sup> In this article I shall endeavour to reconstruct Paul's *rhetorical strategy* from the text itself. This study will present 'a *text-centred descriptive analysis of the way in which Paul attempts to persuade the*'<sup>8</sup> Corinthians to put their focus on the discernment of the wisdom of God and to accept his communication of it. In this regard I will try to answer the following two questions, namely, 'How can one describe Paul's primary rhetorical objective in this specific chapter?' and 'How does Paul attempt to achieve this objective?'<sup>9</sup>

## 2. THE PRIMARY RHETORICAL OBJECTIVE OF PAUL IN 1 CORINTHIANS 2

The first four chapters of 1 Corinthians form a unit in the letter.<sup>10</sup> The problems of factionalism or internal rivalries,<sup>11</sup> which are specifically discussed in these chapters, are at the centre of the congregational difficulties that emerge as the letter proceeds. The problem of divisions in the congregation, which revolves around various leaders in the congregation, is introduced as early as 1 Corinthians 1:10–17. In this section Paul accuses the Corinthian believing community of *σχίσματα*<sup>12</sup> (divisions, 1:10). The facts

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Therefore McNamara, *The Rhetoric of Honour and Shame*, 44 argues that care must be taken not to superimpose ancient rhetorical theory on 1 Corinthians. Due to the above discussion I have opted to read 1 Corinthians as textual rhetoric which is 'a text-centred descriptive analysis.' Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 12 defines 'textual rhetoric' as 'argumentative features characteristic of this particular text.'

See the works of D. Francois Tolmie, 'A Rhetorical Analysis of the Letter to the Galatians' (Ph.D. diss., University of the Free State, 2004), 13–21, and Fredrick J. Long, *Ancient Rhetoric and Paul's Apology: The Compositional Unity of 2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1–113 for more references and discussions on ancient rhetoric. See also the bibliography used by Smit (*Epideictic rhetoric*, 1–32). See also the work of George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) on *worldly* and *radical* rhetoric and the work of Vernon K. Robbins, 'The Dialectical Nature of Early Christian Discourse,' *Scriptura* 59 (1996): 353–362 where he distinguishes six rhetorolects: wisdom, miracle, apocalyptic, opposition, death-resurrection, and cosmic. In the ensuing years, three of the names for the rhetorolects stayed the same (wisdom, miracle, apocalyptic) and three of them changed (opposition to prophetic, death-resurrection to priestly, and cosmic to precreation).

7 See eg. Long, *Ancient Rhetoric*.

8 Tolmie, *A Rhetorical Analysis*, 37.

9 My approach in this research is influenced by the work of Tolmie, *A Rhetorical Analysis*, 37.

10 There is general agreement that 1:10–4:21 constitutes an identifiable section, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 107.

11 See David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 37–39 for a discussion of different and nuanced views with regard to the nature of this conflict in the Corinthian church.

12 This word can have the meaning of 'Division, dissension, schism,' cf. 'σχίσμα,' *BDAG* 981; 'literally *split, rift, division*,' cf. Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Baker's Greek New Testament Library 4; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 372.

regarding the divisions have been communicated orally to Paul by ‘Chloe’s people’ (ὑπὸ τῶν Χλόης, 1:11).<sup>13</sup> They could also have presented Paul with the letter to which he refers in 7:1.<sup>14</sup>

Factions have developed over certain figures of authority.<sup>15</sup> Paul’s response to this problem is not to favour a particular leader over or against another. Instead, he tries to make the community aware of the reality of the schism and to face it.<sup>16</sup> In his treatment of this situation he makes them aware of the joint sharing of their position of *being in Christ*.<sup>17</sup>

This introduction is followed by a discussion of the contrast between human and divine wisdom in 1:18–2:16,<sup>18</sup> an issue that is directly related to this factionalism.<sup>19</sup> Paul tends to treat the problem of division as being symptomatic of a serious and much bigger problem; the Corinthians’ attraction to *the language of worldly wisdom*.<sup>20</sup> Probably some in the community understood themselves to be wise, and consequently regarded themselves as inspired, Spirit-filled persons (3:1).<sup>21</sup> This could have caused an a rejection of Paul’s explanation of the gospel (see 2:1–5).<sup>22</sup>

The key to Paul’s interaction between these twin parallel themes of *faction* and *wisdom* is his conviction that the Spirit unites (see 1 Cor. 12). Where the Spirit of God is present, there can be no internal conflicts, because the Spirit of God alone reveals the divine wisdom (2:10–12). With this conviction in mind, Paul does not discuss the

13 On the reception of the oral report and criteria for reconstructing it, see especially John C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (New York: Seabury, 1983), 47–50 and 61–94, especially 82.

14 Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetorical Situation*, 395.

15 The problems in the Corinthian congregation were most probably internal and consequently resulted in divisions among themselves, cf. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetorical Situation*, 397–398; Stephen M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 237ff and Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 74; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 14; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 6 also agrees that internal strife was an issue in the Corinthian church, but adds another perspective. He argues that the actual problem was division between Paul and some influential teachers. These teachers were leading the Corinthians in an anti-Pauline direction. For Paul this greater conflict presented a crisis over his apostolic authority, as well as the truth of his message, cf. Andries H. Snyman, ‘1 Corinthians 1:18–31 from a Rhetorical Perspective,’ *AcT* 29/1 (2009): 131–132.

16 Cousar, *1 Corinthians*, 169.

17 Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 107.

18 John B. Polhill, ‘The Wisdom of God and Factionalism: 1 Corinthians 1–4,’ *RevExp* 80/3 (1983): 325–339 325.

19 From 3:18–21 and 4:6–10 it is evident that the boasting of the Corinthians over various leaders involves a boasting of their own wisdom. Paul, himself, has also been charged by some members on the church as lacking wisdom (4:1–5, 8–21).

20 Cousar, *1 Corinthians*, 169f; cf. also Snyman, *1 Corinthians*, 131–132.

21 Cousar, *1 Corinthians*, 170.

22 Cf. also Snyman, *1 Corinthians*, 131.

ideas of the various Corinthian groups. For him, the existence of division proves that the various ideas in the Corinthian church have their origins in human wisdom.<sup>23</sup>

The key issue in 1 Corinthians 2 for Paul was: what does it mean to be πνευματικός? Their interest in *wisdom* (σοφία) and *knowledge* (γνώσις, γινώσκω), they believe, gave them special wisdom and superior knowledge.<sup>24</sup> All of this was opposed to both Paul and his gospel (see 1:23) and resulted in boasting and false confidence, which needed to be addressed.<sup>25</sup> In chapter 2 Paul attempts to persuade the Corinthians to accept his explanation of the reception of the gospel (2:1–2), to accept his argument of the importance to know the wisdom of God in order to have the mind of Christ<sup>26</sup> – to be a spiritual man (πνευματικός).

### 3. HOW DOES PAUL ACHIEVE THIS OBJECTIVE?

Paul achieved his objective through the use of the following rhetorical devices: *repetition, comparison and contrast, dialectic language, curiosity and an attractive result*. These devices are now investigated.

#### 3.1 A MATTER OF REPETITION OF IMPORTANT AND SEMANTICALLY RELATED PHRASES AND KEYWORDS<sup>27</sup>

Lengthy descriptions occur in 1 Corinthians 2. They are marked by numerous repetitions of words in literal or varied forms and also by further explanatory appositions. These devices lend a sneering character to this passage.<sup>28</sup> In this subsection only the repetitions are listed and Paul's argumentation is briefly discussed.

##### 3.1.1 REPETITIONS

1. Σοφίαν δὲ λαλοῦμεν (v6); λαλοῦμεν θεοῦ σοφίαν (v7); Σοφίαν (vv1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13);
2. σοφίαν... τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου (v6); τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου (v6); τῶν αἰώνων (v7); τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου (v8);
3. ἔγνωκεν· εἰ γὰρ ἔγνωσαν (v8); τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐδεὶς ἔγνωκεν (v11); τίς γὰρ οἶδεν ἀνθρώπων (v11); τοῦ θεοῦ οὐδεὶς ἔγνωκεν (v11); ἵνα εἰδῶμεν τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ (v12); οὐ δύναται γινῶναι (v14); τίς γὰρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου (v16);
4. τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ (v11); τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (v12); τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (v11); τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κόσμου (v12); τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ (v14);

23 Polhill, 'The Wisdom of God and Factionalism,' 325.

24 For an in depth discussion, cf. Rudolf Bultmann, 'Γινώσκω,' *TDNT* 1:689–719.

25 Cf. Snyman, *1 Corinthians*, 131–132.

26 Cf. Snyman, *1 Corinthians*, 130–132.

27 In this sub-section I am critically influenced by the work of Joop F. M. Smit, 'Epideictic Rhetoric in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 1–4,' *AcT* 29/1 (2009): 1–32.

28 Smit, 'Epideictic Rhetoric,' 13.

5. ἔκρινά (v2); συγκρίνοντες (v13); ἀνακρίνεται (v14), ἀνακρίνει (v15); ἀνακρίνεται (v15);
6. πνευματικοῖς πνευματικὰ (v13); πνευματικῶς (v14); πνεύματος (vv4, 10, 13, 14; πνεῦμα (vv11[2x], 12).

### 3.1.2 ARGUMENTATION

Four key statements which occur in the four subdivisions of 1 Corinthians 2 (2:1–5, 6–9, 10–12, 13–16) structure the chapter. The elaboration of each of the subdivisions realises ‘by further explaining key-notions by means of distinctions.’<sup>29</sup> These distinctions are clearly recognised by the repetitive construction: οὐκ...ἀλλὰ (2:4, 6–7, 8–9, 12, 13).<sup>30</sup>

- οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖ[ς] σοφίας [λόγοις] (2:4, not with plausible words of wisdom). This statement is elaborated in the distinction that the faith of the Corinthians might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God (2:1–5).
- Σοφίαν δὲ λαλοῦμεν ἐν τοῖς τελείοις (2:6, among the mature we do speak wisdom). This statement is elaborated in the two distinctions between wisdom of this aeon and the wisdom of God (2:6–7; 8–9).
- [ἃ] ἡμῖν δὲ ἀπεκάλυψεν ὁ θεὸς διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος (2:10, *these things* God has revealed to us through the Spirit). This statement is elaborated by amplifying the acts and identity of the Spirit (2:10–12). Paul, firstly, distinguishes between the Spirit of God and the human spirit and compares them to one another. Then Paul also pronounces that this Spirit is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God.
- ἃ καὶ λαλοῦμεν (2:13, and we speak of these things). This statement is further explained in the distinction made between speaking with human learning and speaking with the learning of the Spirit of God. This is followed by the distinction between a natural person<sup>31</sup> (ψυχικός) who has no understanding of spiritual things and a spiritual person (πνευματικός) who has such understanding and who judges everything in a spiritual manner.<sup>32</sup>

In these four sub-sections of 1 Corinthians 2 (2:1–5, 6–9, 10–12, 13–16) a similar division is brought about. Two ‘opposing levels are sharply distinguished from each other: the level of the wisdom of this aeon and the level of the wisdom of God which is open to the Spirit’ of God. Paul is here, free from the level of human wisdom and understanding, elevated to that of divine wisdom and spiritual understanding.<sup>33</sup>

In conclusion, this analysis clearly shows that the main issue (divine wisdom) Paul discusses in this chapter deserves the highest acknowledgment. Paul reflects here on the eternal, hidden wisdom of God which God has revealed by and through his Spirit,

29 Smit, ‘Epideictic Rhetoric,’ 14.

30 Cf. also 2:5 on μὴ ... ἀλλ’ and 2:14–15 οὐ ... δὲ.

31 This word can also be translated as ‘non-spiritual’.

32 Cf. Smit, ‘Epideictic Rhetoric,’ 14.

33 Cf. Smit, ‘Epideictic Rhetoric,’ 15.



taught by his Spirit and spoken about in a spiritual manner.<sup>34</sup> All the above indicated related repetitions have been used by Paul in order to emphasise the importance of the discernment of the wisdom of God to consequently mobilize the readers to become πνευματικοί.

### 3.2 A MATTER OF CURIOSITY

The second rhetorical device regards the matter of *curiosity*. In 1 Corinthians 2 there are quite a number of references that fall within the semantic field of the concept *wisdom of God* (θεοῦ σοφία, 2:7). Each of these descriptive references casts some light on the meaning of the wisdom of God and creates a curiosity regarding the content of this wisdom. Nowhere in the context does Paul explicitly define this wisdom. From these references the reader should derive the meaning: the mystery of God (τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ, 2:1);<sup>35</sup> spiritual things (πνευματικά, 2:13); gifts of the Spirit of God (τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ, 2:14) and the mind of Christ (νοῦς Χριστοῦ, 2:16).

Due to the prominence of the *wisdom of God* in this chapter, it will be appropriate to start off investigating it. This then will open the way to relate semantically the rest of the above mentioned references to *the wisdom of God*.

#### 3.2.1 THE WISDOM OF GOD

Paul uses the concept, *wisdom*, seventeen times in 1 Corinthians. Sixteen times it is used in chapters 1–4 and only once in 12:8 where it is referred to as a spiritual gift. In 1 Corinthians 1 he uses it nine times only in a dialectic sense where he opposes the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God. In 1 Corinthians 2 Paul explains the character and the content of the wisdom of God in contrast to the wisdom of the world. Paul explains how he avoided human wisdom and sophistication when he preached in Corinth (2:1–5). He says that he had determined to ‘know nothing...except Jesus Christ.’ Hence, the content of his preaching at Corinth was exclusively that of the crucified Christ (2:2).<sup>36</sup>

The crucifixion as the way of salvation was the most offensive dimension of the gospel. It opposed the human conceit of both Jews and Gentiles. Nevertheless, it was the power of God for salvation.<sup>37</sup> Baird, writing significantly earlier than Polhill and Schnelle, adds a new dimension to the meaning and understanding of this wisdom.<sup>38</sup> According to him, this wisdom involves more than the bare fact of the crucifixion and

34 Cf. Smit, ‘Epideictic Rhetoric,’ 13f.

35 See also semantically related phrases like: τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ (2:10); τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ (2:11)

36 Cf. Polhill, ‘The Wisdom of God and Factionalism,’ 331; also Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology* (trans. M. E. Boring; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 202f.

37 Richard L. Pratt Jr., *I and II Corinthians* (Holman New Testament Commentary 7; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 25.

38 William Baird, ‘Among the Mature: The Idea of Wisdom in 1 Corinthians 2:6,’ *Int* 13/4 (1959): 425–432.

the simple doctrine that Christ died.<sup>39</sup> He is correct in stating that ‘to know nothing but Christ and him crucified’ does not imply a limitation or demarcation of knowledge; instead, it involves understanding the whole plan and purpose of God’s creation and redemption. The wisdom of God is manifested in the proclamation of the crucified Christ who is the revelation and consummation of God’s whole drama of salvation.<sup>40</sup>

In conclusion, Paul uses the phrase ‘wisdom of God’ as reference to intellectual capital, God’s intellectual capital. The reference to wisdom would have attracted the curiosity and interest to know more about it as in the case of the wisdom of the world. The challenge is now for the readers to find out to what this wisdom refers to. According to the context Paul uses the phrase *wisdom of God* (θεοῦ σοφία) as a compound phrase to refer to the ‘message of the death of Christ, or more comprehensively, the gospel regarding Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17a; Rom. 1:16).<sup>41</sup> This interpretation gains further confirmation when the term *mystery* recurs in the plural (μυστηρίων θεοῦ, 4:1). Apparently, it seems to be a reference to the gospel or God’s plan of salvation.’<sup>42</sup>

### 3.2.2 THE MYSTERY OF GOD

A second, though indirect, reference to the *wisdom of God* is found in Paul’s reference to it as *mystery* (2:1, 7, μυστήριον). In this regard Paul uses two more semantically related references to the wisdom of God as *mystery*: *hiddenness* (2:7, ἡ ἀποκεκρυμμένη), and the *depths of God* (2:11, τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ). Although these two nouns (τὸ μυστήριον, τὰ βάθη) and the one passive participle (ἡ ἀποκεκρυμμένη, functioning here as a noun) describe the wisdom of God, the use of nouns seems to suggest that the wisdom is an entity in itself. Paul’s use of words like mystery, hiddenness and depths of God also creates curiosity. What is this?

This wisdom, which forms the essence of Paul’s message, is a secret conceived only by God Himself. Until He unveiled this mystery to Paul, this wisdom was known only to God. In the *corpus Paulinum* a mystery is not something mysterious or a truth that humans cannot comprehend.<sup>43</sup> Instead, according to Kaiser,<sup>44</sup> it is a truth or fact which

39 Walter Kaiser, ‘A Neglected Text in Bibliology Discussions: 1 Corinthians 2:6–16,’ *WTJ* 43/2 (1981): 314 agrees on this and feels that the ‘deep things of God’ must include God’s essence, attributes, and plan.

40 Baird, ‘Among the Mature,’ 431–432; also Richard B. Gaffin, ‘Some Epistological Reflections on 1 Cor 2:6–16,’ *WTJ* 57 (1995): 108, 115.

41 Peter Stuhlmacher, ‘The Hermeneutical Significance of 1 Corinthians 2:6–16,’ in *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of E. Earle Ellis for his 60th birthday* (ed. G. F. Hawthorne; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 334; also Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 227, 250–251.

42 Sigurd Grindheim, ‘Wisdom for the Perfect: Paul’s Challenge to the Corinthian Church (1 Corinthians 2:6–16),’ *JBL* 121 (2002): 696; also Charles K. Barrett, *Christianity at Corinth* (Manchester: John Rylands Library, 1992), 100; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 160.

43 See Vincent Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity, Making Sense of Christian Doctrine* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 4f for a thorough discussion on this point of view.

44 Kaiser, ‘A Neglected Text,’ 312





cannot be discovered by human understanding itself, but which one can adequately grasp once God has revealed it to his prophets or apostles.<sup>45</sup>

The reference to the wisdom of God as *hiddenness* (2:7, ἡ ἀποκεκρυμμένη)<sup>46</sup> qualifies the wisdom as being a mystery. God was pleased to be silent about this wisdom for ages, until the time came for Him to reveal it (cf. Rom. 16:25). God's wisdom was therefore a mystery and was long hidden (ἦν προώρισεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων, 2:7) before God chose to disclose it.<sup>47</sup>

The second reference refers to this wisdom as *the depths of God* (τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ). The revelation which Paul claims for himself in 1 Corinthians 2:10–12, concerns the disclosure of *the depths of God* (τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ). The agent who unveiled this mystery to Paul was the Spirit of God. Indeed, *the depths of God* must refer to God's detailed plan for salvation.<sup>48</sup> Certainly, then, the present tense of the verb *search* (ἐραυνάω,<sup>49</sup> 2:10) can only refer to the unceasing activity of the Spirit. Here it relates to the intra-divine activity as the Spirit of God fulfils the task of revealing the deep things of God (wisdom of God) to Paul.<sup>50</sup>

In conclusion, God takes the initiative and, through a human instrument such as Paul (λαλοῦμεν, 2:7, 13) and the Spirit of God, He reveals his secrets, his hidden things, his wisdom. Operating in and with the preaching of the cross, the Spirit unravels the web in which *worldly wisdom* has caught people. They are brought into a world constituted by the language of crucifixion, where God's wisdom, God's power, God's righteousness and God's will are understood in rather unusual ways.

### 3.2.3 SPIRITUAL THINGS

The second last reference to the *wisdom of God* in 1 Corinthians 2 is reflected in Paul's use of the adjective πνευματικά (spiritual things, 2:13). Paul does not define it. The article τὰ (neuter, plural, accusative) in 2:14 refers back to the adjective πνευματικά

45 See Paul's definition of μυστήριον in Rom. 16:25.

46 This participle can be translated as 'to keep from being known, *keep secret*,' cf. 'ἀποκρύπτω,' *B DAG* 114; and *L&N*, 'ἀποκρύπτω,' §28.80 'keep secret.'

47 Kaiser, 'A Neglected Text,' 312.

48 Kaiser, 'A Neglected Text,' 314. Scholars differ with regard to the meaning of 'the depths of God.' According to Eduard Schweizer, 'Πνεῦμα, πνευματικός,' *TDNT* 6:426 'The content of the supernatural knowledge is not disclosure of mysteries of the heavenly world but the divine act of love effected at the cross, or the divine sonship granted to the believer thereby.' For Kaiser, 'A Neglected Text,' 314 'the deep things of God' includes his nature, attributes and plan. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 98 agrees with Schweizer that the supernatural knowledge refers to the depths of God (τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ, 2:10), to what God has foreordained (προώρισεν, 2:7) and prepared (ἡτοίμασεν, 2:9), the divine plan for human redemption, cf. Rom. 11:33.

49 'ἐραυνάω,' *L&N* 329 understand ἐραυνάω as 'to attempt to learn something by careful investigation or searching – to try to learn, to search, to try to find out, to seek information.' Friberg et al., *Analytical Lexicon*, 171 explain it '(1) as making a thorough investigation *try to find out, search, examine* (John 5:39); (2) of the Spirit's investigation *search (deeply), fathom* (1 Cor. 2:10).' 'ἐραυνάω,' *EDNT* 1:48 is more specific in translating it as 'of the Spirit in 1 Cor. 2:10, πάντα ἐραυνᾷ, "he explores everything."'

50 Kaiser, 'A Neglected Text,' 315.

(2:13, neuter, plural, accusative) but with a more definite qualification with reference to τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ. This subsection points out that the wisdom of God (indicated here as *spiritual things*) cannot really be comprehended by unbelievers. The role of the Spirit in communicating the gospel message (the wisdom of God) raised an important issue for Paul. Those without the Spirit of God are not capable to accept the things that come from the Spirit. The gospel message appears to be foolishness to them. They cannot understand the teachings of the Spirit (2:11). Only those under the influence of the Spirit of God can receive *spiritual things* (πνευματικά).<sup>51</sup>

‘What Paul meant here is that unbelievers cannot lay hold of or deeply appropriate the Christian message. People without the Spirit are impaired in their ability to understand and accept the instructions of the Spirit because their orientation in life is so contrary to the Spirit.’<sup>52</sup> The teachings of the Spirit are foolish and cannot be understood because they are spiritually discerned.

In conclusion, in contrast to unspiritual people, spiritual people are able to make proper judgments (2:15, ὁ δὲ πνευματικὸς ἀνακρίνει [τὰ] πάντα) because they are under the influence of the power of the Spirit of God. They can understand the mystery (secret and hidden), the depths of God. The perception afforded by the Spirit of God equips spiritual people (πνευματικοί) with wisdom (πνευματικά) in all areas of life. Moreover, those *spiritual things* which the Spirit of God teaches are beyond any person’s judgment. In other words, the wisdom of the world (human wisdom) is not able to criticise or scrutinise the spiritual things (2:14) which refers here to the wisdom of God.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.2.4 THE MIND OF CHRIST

The last semantically related expression with regard to the wisdom of God in this text is *the mind of Christ*: ἡμεῖς δὲ νοῦν Χριστοῦ ἔχομεν (2:16). Again Paul does not define it which consequently creates curiosity. Obviously those who have the Spirit of God will long to have the mind of Christ. According to Schrage the last part of verse 2:16 (2:16c), with ‘the Christological application’ of the citation, is the key assertion. For him the change from Lord (κυρίου) to Christ (Χριστοῦ) is of pivotal importance.<sup>54</sup> Schrage reminds us that up to this point all of the major references to Christ have been to a Christ crucified (1:17, 23–24, 30; 2:2; cf. 15:3).<sup>55</sup> This entails that those readers must

51 Pratt, *I and II Corinthians*, 37–38 makes an important statement when he infers that ‘Paul did not mean that unbelievers have absolutely no understanding of the Christian gospel and instruction. It is evident that unbelievers can exceed the abilities of believers in many ways. In fact, Jesus’ parable of the sower and the seeds indicates that unspiritual people can even grasp the gospel of Christ to varying degrees (Matt. 13:3–7). Indeed, Paul himself occasionally affirmed that unbelievers understand some truths (Rom. 2:14–15).’

52 Pratt, *I and II Corinthians*, 38.

53 Cf. Pratt, *I and II Corinthians*, 38.

54 Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther (1 Kor 1, 1–6, 11)* (EKKNT 7/1; Zurich: Benziger Verlag, 1991), 267.

55 Throughout this epistle, and not just here, in 12:1–14:49, and in 15:1–11, 44–58, the work of the Spirit is defined in terms of Christological criteria.

humble themselves, putting to death selfish ambitions and giving themselves for others. Grindheim summarises Paul's point well:

To be spiritual... is to have apprehended the word of the cross in such a way that it has transformed the entire existence of the believer into its image – to a cruciform life, a life characterized by self-sacrificing love, and where power is manifest through weakness.<sup>56</sup>

In conclusion, the expression *mind of Christ* relates closely to the content of *the wisdom of God*. It signifies the spiritual man knowing Christ through the working of the Spirit and the appropriation of the gospel message.<sup>57</sup> The *mind of Christ* refers to the *obedience of Christ*. Paul appeals to it now as a paradigm for Christian discipleship: 'And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them' (2 Cor. 5:15).<sup>58</sup>

### 3.3 A MATTER OF CONTRAST

The third rhetorical device used by Paul in his rhetoric in chapter two is that of *contrast*.<sup>59</sup> Here I want to focus on two kinds of contrast perceived from the text: (1) Contrast between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world; and (2) contrast between the Spirit of God and the spirit of the World. This contrast is strengthened by the repetitive Greek construction: οὐκ...ἀλλᾶ.

#### 3.3.1 CONTRAST BETWEEN THE WISDOM OF GOD AND THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD

Nowhere in the long discussion of wisdom, which begins at 1:18ff, does Paul define what is meant by the *wisdom* that characterizes the factions experienced at Corinth.<sup>60</sup>

56 Grindheim, *Wisdom*, 708–709; cf. also Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 100–102.

57 Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New Testament Commentary 18; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 94.

58 The understanding of James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 250 of 'the mind of the Lord' adds another perspective which complements that of Willis and others. In the context of Isa. 40:13, the answer to the question 'Who knows the mind of the Lord?' is that only God can know these things. For Paul, only those who are spiritual have access to the mind of Christ, which in turn gives clearer insight into the mind of God. This then infers that those who know 'the mind of the Lord' will have clearer insight into 'the depths of God.'

59 In this essay I want to distinguish between dialectics and contrasting language: dialectics as used here is 'A method of argument or exposition that systematically weighs contradictory facts or ideas with a view to the resolution of their real or apparent contradictions.' Contrasting language as used here is 'to set in opposition in order to show or emphasize differences,' cf. 'The Free Dictionary,' n.p. [cited 28 January 2013]. Online: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com>.

60 For Grindheim, *Wisdom*, 689–690 Paul understood these factions as symptomatic of a theological error. He thinks (*Wisdom*, 690) that 'Paul's discourse on wisdom in 1 Corinthians 2:6–16 serves his rhetorical purpose of undermining the basis of the various factions.' Pogoloff, *Logos*, 104 differs from Grindheim. According to him: 'Paul is addressing an exigence of the ethical dimensions of division,

Nor does he define the content of the wisdom for the mature in 2:6ff. This is because it is not Paul's intention to do so: it would side-track his whole argument. His entire purpose is to emphasise the contrast that exists between the wisdom of God and human wisdom<sup>61</sup> so that the reader will opt to know the wisdom of God rather than the wisdom of the world. The following is a brief analysis of how he contrasts this:

I did not come proclaiming <u>the mystery of God</u> to you	in <u>lofty words or wisdom</u> (2:1)
My speech and my proclamation were <i>not</i> with <u>plausible words of wisdom</u> ,	but with a demonstration of <u>the Spirit and of power</u> (2:4)
your faith might rest <i>not</i> on <u>human wisdom</u>	but on the <u>power of God</u> (2:5)
it is <i>not</i> a <u>wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age</u> , who are doomed to perish.	<sup>7</sup> But we speak <u>God's wisdom</u> , secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages (2:6–7)
'these things'...not taught by <u>human wisdom</u>	<i>but</i> taught by <u>the Spirit</u> (2:13)

This contrast is evident in Paul's antithetic references to human wisdom.<sup>62</sup> Paul wants to convince the Corinthians about the vast difference between these two wisdoms.<sup>63</sup> Each one of these statements (except *lofty words of wisdom*) is further explained by key-notions by means of contrasts. These contrasts are clearly recognised by the repetitive construction: οὐκ...ἀλλὰ (not...but, 2:4, 6–7, 13).<sup>64</sup> A symbiosis of the human wisdom epitomizes the human wisdom to be lofty words (2:1) or plausible words of wisdom (2:4), even a wisdom of this age (2:6) or of the rulers of this age (2:6, 8). None of this

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not doctrinal divergence.' It is with reference to such diverse understanding that James D. G. Dunn, *1 Corinthians* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 43 refers to the negligence of scholarly investigation of the theological dimension of the conflict.

61 Wisdom of God (θεοῦ σοφία, 2:7), coming from the Spirit (2:10–12) and the human wisdom (ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία, 2:5, 13) or wisdom of this age (σοφία τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, 2:6) or plausible words of wisdom (πειθοί[ς] σοφίας [λόγοις], 2:4) or lofty words of wisdom (ὕπεροχὴ λόγου ἢ σοφίας).

62 The antitheses are indicated in italics.

63 Only the Spirit of God apprehends the plans and purposes of God, and only this Spirit can link God and humans together, cf. Paul J. Du Plessis, *TEAEIOΣ: The Idea of Perfection in the New Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 1959), 218. What God is doing, only God knows, cf. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 99). Paul W. Gooch, *Partial Knowledge: Philosophical Studies in Paul* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 36 explains what Paul means: 'It is not simply that just as individuals have private thoughts not known to others, God has private thoughts too, rather, if human things are known only to human knowers, divine things are known only to God's Spirit.' Paul's intention 'is to draw a thick and heavy line between things human and divine and to place the things of God squarely outside the limits of human knowing,' cf. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 99.

64 Cf. also 2:5 on μὴ...ἀλλ'.

world's rulers<sup>65</sup> understood the wisdom of God (2:8).<sup>66</sup> Indeed, in their ignorance of this wisdom, they crucified the Lord of glory.

The antithesis of the human wisdom is the wisdom of God, the mystery of God.<sup>67</sup> It was a hiddenness and it is part of the depths of God. It was known only to God. It is revealed by the Spirit, taught by the Spirit which interprets these spiritual things (wisdom) to spiritual people. Paul describes the spiritual person who connects with this wisdom to have the mind of Christ. This wisdom was superior to all human thought.<sup>68</sup>

65 Cousar, *1 Corinthians*, 171 interpreted τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου as political and religious figures or as apocalyptic powers. In his article on the same subject Gene Miller, 'Archontōn tou aiōnos toutou: A New Look at 1 Corinthians 2:6–8,' *JBL* 91/4 (1972): 522–528 convincingly argued that, in 1 Corinthians 2:6–8, they 'are to be understood as a reference to human, earthly authorities, and not to supernatural or spiritual, demonic or angelic powers.' They trusted in their own *human wisdom* and plans and consequently knew nothing of the *wisdom of God*. Gaffin, 'Some Epistemological Reflections,' 110 added to this: 'The rulers of this age are representative; in them we see the most impressive achievements of the present world-order, measured by the standards of human rebellion and unbelief; within the creation, as presently subject to the curse on sin (cf. Rom. 8:18–22), they exemplify the most that it has to offer and is capable of attaining.'

66 Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity*, 4 points out that 'Although believers would admit that Jesus 'suffered for our salvation' the way in which this is usually explained seems highly problematical.' He states that if such fundamental doctrines involve logical and moral conundrums, how then can Christians be required to believe doctrines which they cannot understand?

67 Du Plessis, *TEAEIOS*, 179 points out the 'antithesis that has been prominent all the way since 1:18 between the believers and those who are lost: 'those who are saved' vs. 'those who are lost' (1:18); 'those who believe' vs. 'Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom' (1:21–22); 'those who are called' vs. 'the wise' (1:24, 27); 'the perfect' vs. 'the rulers' (2:6); 'for our glory' vs. 'those who perish' (2:7, 6); 'to us God has revealed' vs. 'none of the rulers of this world knew' (2:10, 8); 'those who love him' vs. 'they crucified the lord of glory' (2:9, 8); 'the Spirit that is from God' vs. 'the spirit of the world' (2:12); 'spiritual' vs. 'natural human being' (2:15, 14); 'the mind of Christ' vs. 'foolishness for them' (2:16, 14).' Cf. also Grindheim, *Wisdom*, 705 for such a list of opposites.

68 In the first two chapters, a series of antithetical statements are set over against one another as pointed out in the previous footnote. In 1:20–21 Paul counters 'the wisdom of the world' (ἡ σοφία τοῦ κόσμου) with 'the wisdom of God' (ἡ σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ). The weakness of the language of worldly wisdom is that it cannot enable the world to know God (1:21); it cannot bring God to discourse. Instead, Paul argues that the preaching of the crucified Messiah is understandably foolish to the eyes of the world. This preaching, conversely, becomes the instrument whereby God proves the wisdom of the wise to be wrong, cf. Cousar, *1 Corinthians*, 170. The gospel of the cross seems to be foolishness for those without the Spirit of God, but antithetically proves to be the power of God for those who have the Spirit of God residing in them (1:18). This dual effect of the gospel of the cross is then delineated in the following two consecutive pericopes. The *foolish* effect is elaborated on in 1:19–2:5 and the *powerful* or *wise* effect in 2:6–3:23. 'In 1:19–31 Paul explains how God has overturned the values of the world,' cf. Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 87. That which is considered wise in the world is foolishness to God, and vice versa (1:21, 25; cf. 2:14), cf. Grindheim, *Wisdom*, 693. Also Theissen views these two pericopes, 1:18–2:5 and 2:6–3:23, to be an antithetical parallelism.

Paul continues to describe this wisdom,<sup>69</sup> which does not originate from empirical sources, traditional knowledge in the community, or from intuitive insight or imagination. With these references Paul has shattered every conceivable earthly source for these words of wisdom which he announces. Consequently, this wisdom could only emanate from God. What Paul is claiming is clear: the wisdom of God is a revelation, a disclosure of the divine mind by the Spirit to the apostle, a human being.

In conclusion the wisdom of God was disclosed (*ἀπεκάλυπεν*) and taught (*διδασκεῖ*) by the Spirit (*πνεύματος*) ‘who interprets (*συγκρίνοντες*) the spirit-manifestations (*πνευματικά*) to spiritual men (*πνευματικοῖς*)’<sup>70</sup> (2:13), ‘so that we may know (*εἰδῶμεν*) the things given to us by God’ (2:12). Paul contrasts the wisdom of the divine with human wisdom in order to create a yearning to come to know this divine wisdom.

### 3.3.2 CONTRAST BETWEEN THE SPIRIT OF GOD AND THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD

The following table analyses the contrast between the human spirit and the Spirit of God.

My speech and my proclamation <u>were not</u> with plausible words of wisdom	<u>but</u> with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power (2:4)
For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within?	So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the <i>Spirit of God</i> (2:11)
Now we have received <u>not</u> the <i>spirit of the world</i> .	<u>but</u> the <i>Spirit that is from God</i> . (2:12)
And we speak of these things in words <u>not</u> taught by human wisdom	<u>but</u> taught by the <i>Spirit</i> , interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.
Those who are unspiritual do <u>not</u> receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (2:14).	( <i>οἱ</i> ) Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny (2:15).

In this table the *human spirit* (2) and the *spirit of the world* (3) are explicitly contrasted with the *Spirit of God* or the *Spirit that is from God*. In rows (1) and (4) is the *Spirit* (of God) implicitly contrasted with the *human spirit*, implied in the references *words of wisdom* and *human wisdom*. In 2:14 the Spirit of God is explicitly contrasted with the human spirit (*ψυχικός*) and in 2:15 also: *πνευματικὸς ἀνακρίνει* [τὰ] πάντα, αὐτοὺς δὲ ὑπ' οὐδενὸς ἀνακρίνεται.

From this analysis it is evident that the human spirit is equivalent to the spirit of the world and is also epitomized as unspiritual (*ψυχικός*). This spirit speaks lofty and plausible words of wisdom. They ‘do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are

69 In this verse Paul is not trying to point out what he communicates to the spiritual (mature) but to demonstrate ‘the nature of that wisdom to be sublime and inaccessible to man,’ cf. Kaiser, ‘A Neglected Text,’ 313.

70 Also translated ‘...in a spiritual way...’ This possibility will become clearer later on in this article.



foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned' (2:14).

In contrast to the human spirit, the Spirit of God enables Paul to speak with power and also enables him to know what is truly of God. The spiritual man (πνευματικός) is taught by the Spirit who also interprets spiritual things to them. Because the Spirit of God lives in them they can discern all things and are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.

In conclusion it can be deduced that Paul vehemently contrasts the extreme differences that exist between the *wisdom of God* and the *wisdom of the world* as well as the *spirit of the world* and the *Spirit of God*. The wisdom of the world is known through the spirit of the world and the wisdom of God can only be known through the Spirit of God. Paul's objective was to emphasise the absolute differences so that his readers, a believing community, will choose to live as πνευματικοί.

### 3.4 A MATTER OF DIALECTICS

This subsection investigates Paul's use of dialectics in his rhetoric. Here we see how Paul systematically weighs contradictory facts or ideas with the objective to reach a resolution of their contradictions.

#### 3.4.1 THE APOSTLE PAUL VERSUS THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Subsection 2:1–5 forms a prelude for the main text (2:6–16) where Paul turns to his own preaching.<sup>71</sup> He recalls the point at which the discussion of the failure of human wisdom began (1:17). If he had communicated the gospel with sophistication, he says, the Corinthians might have been persuaded by his rhetoric and sophistry<sup>72</sup> rather than by the Spirit of God. In these verses Paul explains how he avoided human wisdom and sophistication when he preached in Corinth.

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71 In 2:1–5 Paul uses the first person singular, personal pronoun (2:1, 3, 4, *ἐγὼ* and *μου*). In the next pericope (2:6–16) the plural personal pronoun *we* is the subject of the verb *λαλοῦμεν*, *we speak* (2:6). Throughout this passage, Paul employs the first person plural pronoun *we* or *us* in verses 10, 12, 13, and 16. Paul most likely refers to himself by this first person plural pronoun *we* or *us*. Perhaps in a derivative sense he also incorporates those fellow-teachers who laboured with him. But in 1 Corinthians 3:1 he switches back to the first person singular pronoun (cf. Kaiser, 'A Neglected Text,' 311; Grindheim, *Wisdom*, 699). Smit, *Epideictic Rhetoric*, 13 is of opinion that the subject of the plural pronoun is both Paul and Apollos.

72 Timothy H. Lim, 'Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom, but in the Demonstration of the Spirit and Power,' *NovT* 29/2 (1987): 149 points out that it can be assumed that 'Paul is rejecting the contemporary, sophist techniques as they were applied to preaching – a practice which emphasises the form rather than the content of the sermon and the role of the preacher rather than the Gospel', cf. 1 Cor. 4:20. However, according to Lim, with regard to the literary features in the *corpus Paulinum* recent scholarly interest has mostly pointed to devices and rhetorical strategies of Graeco-Roman rhetoric which Paul employs in his letters.

First, he demonstrated *no persuasive powers or rhetoric* (2:4a) but preached only the message of the crucified Christ (2:2):<sup>73</sup> ‘I did not come proclaiming to you in lofty words or wisdom ... (2:1). For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ... (2:2). My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom (2:4a).’ From these verses it is clear that Paul had decided to make Jesus the centre of his teaching when he preached at Corinth.<sup>74</sup> This is why he did not come with ‘lofty words’ (2:1) or ‘plausible words’ (2:4) of wisdom. The choice of such a deliberate focus was based on his discernment and understanding of the gospel (cf. also Gal. 1:15) and the needs of the Corinthian community.

Second, his style of preaching and physical presence among them were both characterised by *weakness, fear, and trembling* (2:3): ‘And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.’<sup>75</sup> ‘Stripped of self-reliance,’<sup>76</sup> Paul had to rely on the mercy and grace of God, and how God could work powerfully through him.<sup>77</sup>

Third, Paul *avoided plausible words of wisdom* in favour of ‘the demonstration of the Spirit and power of God’ (2:4): ‘My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power.’ With respect to his *style* of preaching (speech), as well as its *content* (proclamation), Paul intended that the ensuing faith of the Corinthians be grounded in the power of God and not in human wisdom.<sup>78</sup> God’s wisdom cannot be obtained through human wisdom

In conclusion, Paul stresses his weakness in order to nullify the wisdom allegations of the Corinthians and to emphasise the role and the power involvement of the Spirit in his proclamation of the mystery of God (2:1). He relied on the Spirit to convince the Corinthians so that their faith would not be based on the wisdom of any person (Greek culture relied on the worldly wisdom of philosophers and rhetoricians). In response, Paul points out that one of his primary goals is that the Corinthians build their lives on

73 Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* (trans. J. P. Galvin; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987), 353 is of the opinion that Paul’s rejection of persuasive words of wisdom in 2:4 might be an influence of the Jewish wisdom traditions on Paul’s language.

74 Pratt, *I and II Corinthians*, 25.

75 Paul’s comments about his weakness are not simply a rhetorical strategy as Pogoloff, *Logos*, 136 suggests, citing Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.1.8–10: ‘We shall derive some silent support from representing that we are weak, unprepared, and no match for the powerful talents arrayed against us’ (cf. also Dio Chrysostom, *Dial.* 3). Paul does not reject rhetoric altogether in 1 Corinthians 2:4. His objective was to criticize the emphasis and practice of the Corinthian preachers of employing human wisdom in preaching. For Paul, preaching the gospel is not dependent upon any human techniques of persuasiveness. It is only dependent upon the demonstration of the Spirit and power (2:4, 5). This does not mean that devices and strategies of rhetoric are prohibited in preaching, but rather that they should be confined to their proper limits (Lim, ‘Not in Persuasive Words,’ 148).

76 The real danger, according to Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 96.

77 See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 85–86 for a good and thorough discussion on how other scholars have interpreted Paul’s reference: ‘weakness and in fear and in much trembling’ (2:3, ἀσθενεία καὶ ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἐν τρόμῳ πολλῷ ἐγενόμην).

78 Cousar, *1 Corinthians*, 170. For Paul, the kingdom of God is not manifested in words, but in power (1 Cor. 4:20; cf. 2:5).

a new foundation, not on the wisdom of men (as in the case of Greek philosophers), but on the power of God.<sup>79</sup>

### 3.4.2 HUMAN UNDERSTANDING VERSUS SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

Paul's use of the phrase *the Spirit that is from God* (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ), as a freely given gift from God, in 2:12 stands in semantic opposition or contrast to the phrase *the spirit of the world* (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κόσμου, 2:12), what is drawn from the world.<sup>80</sup> This contrast is further intensified by the emphatic place of ἡμεῖς at the beginning of the verse.<sup>81</sup> These two πνεῦμα-references help the reader to understand the dichotomy among people to which this verse refers: those in whom the Spirit of God dwells as *spiritual* people (2:12–13) and those who have the spirit of the world as *natural* people (2:12–14).<sup>82</sup> Here, Paul distinguishes clearly 'between human beings who are governed by their own inner (sinful) nature, and those who are governed by the Spirit of God.'<sup>83</sup> The *spirit of the world* rules a person in whom the Spirit of God does not live. It is a power that determines 'all the thinking and doing of men, which places itself over against the Spirit who is of God (1 Cor. 2:12).'<sup>84</sup>

By contrast, as Paul expresses persuasively, believers have received the Spirit that proceeds from God (2:12; see also John 15:26; Gal. 4:6). God's Spirit comes to the believers from a sphere or dimensions other than this world and conveys knowledge of God, creation, redemption, and restoration. Since Pentecost, the Spirit of God dwells in the hearts of all believers (6:19).<sup>85</sup> This divine Spirit discloses God's own wisdom.<sup>86</sup>

79 Pratt, *I and II Corinthians*, 26; also Cousar, *I Corinthians*, 170. Note the strong adversative force of the double connective or adversative particles δὲ...δὲ ('On the contrary'), 'Yet we speak wisdom (2:6)...we speak God's wisdom' (2:7). The genitive here in 2:7, *wisdom of God* (θεοῦ σοφίαν), is simply possessive; it is the wisdom which belongs to God and which He reveals to those *called ...by the will of God* (κλητὸς...διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ, 1:1).

80 Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 261.

81 Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 262; also Kistemaker and Hendriksen, *Exposition*, 88. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 259–260 emphasizes this aspect of *receiving* as a *gift*.

82 Paul was deeply influenced by Hebrew thought. He did not distinguish sharply between body, mind, and soul or spirit. The Hebrew word that was used for *flesh* usually meant human nature with its weakness. The word that was used for *soul* meant human nature with special reference to its inner life and vitality. Finally, the word that was used for *spirit* referred to the breath of *life*, which was not essentially part of man at all. This life was breathed into him by God (Gen. 2:7), cf. Paul Ellingworth and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians* (UBS Handbook Series; New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 61. Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 80 on these thoughts in Paul's theology.

83 Ellingworth and Hatton, *A Handbook*, 61.

84 Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. J. R. de Witt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 92.

85 Kistemaker and Hendriksen, *Exposition*, 89.

86 Theissen, *Psychological Aspects*, 385 made a convincing observation about the relation between 2:12–14 and modern learning theory. According to him the church at Corinth has already drawn its new life from the proclamation of the cross (1:18–2:5). But now all this has to be more deeply appropriated (2:6–3:23). Both sections trace the themes of divine wisdom as *unrecognizable* (1:18–21

This *wisdom* of 2:6–16, however, is *not* a matter of *new contents*, but a deeper grasp of realities which ‘emancipate [them]...from the compulsive standards of this world.’<sup>87</sup>

To express the understanding of this divine wisdom Paul uses the semantically related verbs συγκρίνω and ἀνακρίνω. The Greek verb συγκρίνω is not used anywhere else in the New Testament except in 2 Corinthians 10:12, where it occurs twice and means *compare*. In both places where Paul uses this verb, it is accompanied in the immediate context by another verb (ἀνακρίνω, 2:14–15 and ἐγκρίναι, 2 Cor. 10:12). Both verbs have the same lemma, κρίνω, which means ‘judge.’<sup>88</sup> Here, as in the case about wisdom, Paul seems to be taking up a word that is used by his opponents in Corinth. He redefines it with what he believes to be the true Christian message.<sup>89</sup> The Greek verb ἀνακρίνω refers in this context to the process of examination and investigation that leads up to a judgment.<sup>90</sup> In this verse the meaning of ἀνακρίνω is that it is only with the help of the Spirit of God that the gifts of the Spirit can be examined and be understood.<sup>91</sup>

### 3.4.3 THE SPIRITUAL MAN VERSUS THE NATURAL MAN AND THE FLESHLY MAN

The third dialectic matter shows how Paul creates a critical centre in his comparison of the natural man (ψυχικός) with the spiritual man (πνευματικός) and the spiritual man with the one living in the flesh (σαρκικός). The entire chapter 2 and 3:1–4<sup>92</sup> is a critical reflection of transformation in God.<sup>93</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 2 and 3:1–4 Paul points out two critical and related matters involved in the discernment of the wisdom of God: a person has to *undergo an intellectual change* and a person also has to *continue changing*. Paul critically describes these two matters in a comparative way. He compares those who are spiritual (πνευματικοί) with (1) those who live on an entirely human level (ψυχικοί) and (2) with those moved by entirely human drives (σαρκικοί). In the *first* comparison of the πνευματικοί with the ψυχικοί, Paul refers to their epistemological cognitive differences. He compares their intellectual faculties. It is striking how 1 Corinthians 2 is saturated with semantically related words on cognition. For Paul, before anyone can discern the divine wisdom, that person has to undergo a radical intellectual change and renewal, a change and renewal that can only be performed by the Spirit of God. In the *second* critical comparison of the πνευματικοί with the σαρκικοί, Paul emphasises the continuity of change that should take place in

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and 2:6–8) and *foolish* (1:22–25 and 2:9–16) when placed within the wrong frame of reference (Jews and Gentiles, 1:22–25; the *unspiritual*, 2:9–16).

87 Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 263.

88 Cf. Hertrich Büchsel, ‘Κρίνω,’ *TDNT* 3:933–954 for a more detailed discussion.

89 Ellingworth and Hatton, *A Handbook*, 60.

90 In Acts 17:11 the meaning is that the Jews in Berea were examining the Scriptures carefully, in order to see whether what the Christians were saying was true, cf. Ellingworth and Hatton, *A Handbook*, 62.

91 Ellingworth and Hatton, *A Handbook*, 62.

92 For this matter we will have to incorporate 1 Corinthians 3:1–4.

93 See Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 484 for a definition of discernment.

a person's life. For Paul, only those who are spiritual and continue to live a spiritual life can increasingly discern the exclusive wisdom of God through the mediation of the Spirit of God.<sup>94</sup>

In conclusion, it became evident, firstly, that Paul intended to convince his readers that the ensuing faith of the Corinthians be grounded in the power of God and not in human wisdom. Secondly, that the *spirit of the world* rules a person in whom the Spirit of God does not live (ψυχικός) and determines all the thinking and doing of that person. Contrary to this the divine Spirit discloses the wisdom of God to the spiritual man (πνευματικός). Thirdly, that in his comparison of the natural man (ψυχικός) with the spiritual man (πνευματικός) and the spiritual man with the one living in the flesh (σαρκικός) only those who are spiritual and continue to live a spiritual life can increasingly discern the exclusive wisdom of God through the mediation of the Spirit of God. Paul uses these dialectics to systematically weigh the contradictory exponents with the one objective in mind, to reach a resolution of their contradictions.

### 3.5 A MATTER OF AN ATTRACTIVE RESULT – THE MIND OF CHRIST

In 1 Corinthians 2 Paul discusses the process how the wisdom of God was communicated to them from the point of revelation until the point of an end result.<sup>95</sup> From the text the following five events in this process can be distinguished which culminate in the sixth, a status, having the mind of Christ.<sup>96</sup>

1. '...these things God has *revealed* (ἀπεκάλυψεν) to us through the Spirit...' (2:10);
2. '...*taught* (διδασκοῖς) by the Spirit...' (2:13);
3. '...*interpreting* (συγκρίνοντες) spiritual things...' (2:13);<sup>97</sup>
4. '...may *understand* (οἶδα) the gifts bestowed on us by God' (2:12);
5. '...to *understand* (γινῶναι)<sup>98</sup> them because they are spiritually *discerned* (ἀνακρίνεται)' (2:14).
6. '...we have the *mind of Christ*' (νοῦν Χριστοῦ ἔχομεν) (2:16).

The communication process starts off with the *revelation* (ἀποκαλύπτειν, 2:10)<sup>99</sup> of the *wisdom of God* through the Spirit. Then the teaching (διδάσκειν, 2:13) of *these*

94 These two critical and comparative matters I have already investigated and published in my article, 'Cognitive Transformation and Spiritual Growth: The Matrix for Discerning the Wisdom of God' (An Exploration in Pauline Discernment: Part 2). *Nederduits Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 54 (2013), forthcoming.

95 When Waaijman, *Spirituality*, 582 discusses the analysis of Aristotle's practical wisdom, he draws attention to the need for wisdom to discern all possibilities in a specific concrete situation and consequently to orient everything to that end.

96 See Kaiser, 'A Neglected Text,' 311.

97 See also verses 2:14–15 where ἀνακρίνεται is used (3x).

98 The text (2:14) uses 'understand' in a negative sense, referring to the natural man who 'does not receive the gifts of God's Spirit' and consequently cannot understand the spiritual things.

99 Cf. Kaiser, 'A Neglected Text,' 314 who initiated the idea of *revelation* and *inspiration* in these texts.

things by the Spirit take place and can be interpreted as *inspiration*. The interpretation (συγκρίνειν) and the assessment of it is the moment of discernment of the wisdom. The next two related verbs (εἰδέναι and γινώσκειν) are used to indicate understanding and can be interpreted as the *illumination of the wisdom*. At this point the comprehension of the wisdom of God takes place and the spiritual person (πνευματικός) reaches the point to have the *mind of Christ* (νοῦν Χριστοῦ ἔχειν). Although different verbs have been used by Paul to indicate different phases in this process, they are all connected semantically in order to constitute *comprehension*. The sequence of these verbs in the text also shows a logical progression in the process (see verses 10–16): reveal – teach – interpret – understand.<sup>100</sup> The one flows into the other. They all contribute in some way to the comprehension of the wisdom of God.

This composite event culminates in having the *mind of Christ* (νοῦν Χριστοῦ ἔχειν, 2:16).<sup>101</sup> The grammar and syntax of the relative pronoun ὅς (*who*) in 2:16, both picks up the LXX<sup>102</sup> and functions in effect as a consecutive to express result, or more accurately *contemplated result*.<sup>103</sup> To have the wisdom of God is to have the mind of Christ. And if one has the mind of Christ one can discern the will of God. Paul implies that the mind of a spiritual person must be in harmony with God's mind. When man is controlled by God's Spirit, he desires to fulfill God's law, to do God's will, and to reflect God's glory.<sup>104</sup>

The impossibility of coming to know the mind of the Lord (again, as in 2:14, *ingressive*<sup>105</sup> aorist of γινώσκω) applies to the ψυχικοί, that is, those who live on an entirely human level (v. 14). This would be firmly enunciated by the church at Corinth, and would not be disputed by Paul, except perhaps with respect at times to the mood with which it was uttered. But Paul may well be adding a further dimension of his own.<sup>106</sup> This becomes still more evident when we recall that the word mind (νοῦς) constitutes a mode of thought or mind-set. Similarly, νοῦς denotes 'a constellation of thoughts and beliefs which provides the criteria for judgments and actions.'<sup>107</sup> Jewett speaks of *character* or *disposition*.<sup>108</sup>

100 Schnelle, *Apostle Paul*, 202 points out that the Corinthians too attributed noetic capacities of the spirit-endowed person to the Spirit of God (2:12b, *understand*; 2:13, *taught, interpret*; 2:14–15, *discern*).

101 This is an indication of how the wisdom of God was prudently received. This group of related events note a developmental process and certain logical connections, cf. *L&N*, xviii.

102 According to Ellingworth and Hatton, *A Handbook*, 63 comes this quotation from Isa. 40:13 and is fairly accurate.

103 Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 274.

104 Kistemaker and Hendriksen, *Exposition*, 93.

105 On the ingressive aorist cf. Conradie et. al., *Grieks met Begrip: 'n Inleidende Grammatika Toegespsits op die Griekse Nuwe Testament* (Wetenskaplike Bydraes van die Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir CHO 21; Aucklandpark: Werkgroep vir Griekse Onderrig, 1995), 107 and Charles D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), §4.

106 Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 274.

107 Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of their Use in Conflict Settings* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 361.

108 Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, 362; cf. also Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 275.



To summarise: In 1 Corinthians 2 Paul discusses the process of the communication of the wisdom of God, how it was communicated to him and those in Corinth from the starting point of revelation until the point of an end result – to have the mind of Christ. From the text five events in this process were distinguished which culminate in the πνευματικός having the mind of Christ. For the readers to know that they can attain mind of Christ would be a challenge for them in an environment where knowledge was highly evaluated. It would highly motivate them also to obtain the mind of Christ.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Discernment for the correct understanding and implementation of the wisdom of God was a matter of great concern for Paul in the Corinthian congregation. In this research I endeavoured to reconstruct Paul's *rhetorical strategy* of creating a dichotomous spirituality in order to cause a spiritual tension among his readers: those who have the spirit of the world (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κόσμου) and those who have the Spirit of God (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ). This is needed to address the problem of factionalism (and the other problems in the community) which led to the schism in the believing community. My *modus operandi* was a text-centred descriptive analysis of the way in which Paul attempts to persuade the Corinthians to focus on the discernment of the wisdom of God. It seems that the primary rhetorical objective of Paul in 1 Corinthians 2 was Paul's attempt to persuade the Corinthians to accept his argument to orientate themselves to follow his instructions in realizing their new life in Christ<sup>109</sup> and to be πνευματικοί – to have the mind of Christ. Therefore, the objective in this article was to point out *some rhetorical devices* embedded in chapter 2 which Paul used to achieve his objective:

*Repetition* (emphasis): Paul uses the high frequency of repetition to emphasise all those repeated aspects and to highlight those key notions in this discourse. This repetition contributes to the cohesiveness of chapter 2. *Curiosity*: Paul refers to the wisdom of God using various semantic related expressions. The curiosity Paul tries to create, drives him to let his readers become interested to learn something new. *Contrast*: Paul uses opposites such as the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man as well as the spirit of the world and the Spirit of God to create contrast. He wants his readers to perceive these items more clearly and in a new light. He uses contrast so that they could reconsider their position again. *Dialectics*: Paul's use of dialectics is to focus the readers' attention on the Spirit as the medium through which the wisdom of God is communicated, to emphasize the discernment of the wisdom of God and finally to exhort the readers to live as πνευματικοί. He uses dialectics so that they could reconsider their challenge coming from Paul. *The mind of Christ*: his argument and rhetoric in chapter 2 culminate in his statement in 2:16: '... but we have the mind of Christ' (ἡμεῖς δὲ νοῦν Χριστοῦ ἔχομεν). With this statement Paul challenges his readers to change their spirituality and to become like Christ.

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109 Cf. Snyman, *1 Corinthians*, 131–132.

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